

Baptist church ordains transgender woman

by [Bob Allen](#) in the [August 6, 2014](#) issue

In what is likely a first, Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., has ordained Allyson Robinson, who was previously ordained as a man, to the gospel ministry.

The transgender woman, who attended George W. Truett Theological Seminary and pastored a church in Central Texas as a man, has returned to the pulpit.

Allyson Robinson began June 23 as transitions pastor at Calvary Baptist. The calling is temporary—helping with preaching, mentoring, and pastoral care duties along with the deacons until the church names a longer-term intentional interim pastor—probably this fall.

Calvary Baptist reaffirmed Robinson's ordination June 15, prior to Pastor Amy Butler's departure to become senior minister of Riverside Church in New York City.

"Allyson Dylan Robinson is a minister of the gospel, trained for the task, and ordained to the gospel ministry by another community in which she has served as pastor," Butler said in an ordination litany later posted on her blog.

"Over the course of her journey, God has invited her to step into the faithful witness of a new identity, a true identity, and a new name," she continued. "While we have always known her as Allyson, she was ordained with a different name."

Robinson, an LGBT rights activist who has worked in the past for the Human Rights Campaign and as executive director of a network for gays in the military, has previous experience in pastoral ministry, including five years at Azorean Baptist Church in Portugal and as pastor of Meadow Oaks Baptist Church in Temple, Texas. The latter post took place while she was studying for her M.Div. at Truett Seminary between 2005 and 2007.

A 1994 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, Robinson was commissioned as an officer in the army. Then known as Daniel Robinson, she commanded PATRIOT missile units in Europe and the Middle East, served as a senior trainer/evaluator for NATO, and was an adviser to the armed forces of Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, and Qatar.

She resigned her commission in 1999 to pursue a calling to Christian ministry. She enrolled at Truett intending to continue in ministry as a Christian man, but her first few semesters found her soul searching about gender-identity issues that had haunted her since childhood.

“I prayed for 25 years of my life, since I was old enough to know how to pray, that God would fix me,” Robinson told the *Waco Tribune-Herald* in 2011. “I did everything I thought God wanted me to do, that a good Christian man should do.”

When things got to the point where she contemplated suicide, Robinson went into therapy. About halfway through her M.Div. studies she told loved ones about her desire to live as a woman. Danyelle Robinson, who married Daniel Robinson in 1994 and is the mother of their four children, stood by her spouse.

Robinson postponed her “coming out” until her graduation from Truett in December 2007 because of Baylor University’s policies regarding homosexuality and gender identity. She resigned from the pulpit before her final semester.

Today Robinson runs Warrior Poet Strategies, a consulting firm that advises clients on organizational design, change strategy, diversity management, and social and civic entrepreneurship.

“Calvary’s affirmation of my ordination is certainly very meaningful to my family and me,” Robinson said in an e-mail July 9. “Prior to my ‘coming out,’ we lamented that soon we would never be welcome in a church of our tradition again. To our great joy the Calvary family proved us wrong, just as it has so many others who have felt similar fears.”

“They have embraced Danyelle, our children, and me wholeheartedly and unreservedly,” she said. “They’ve ministered to us in our times of need and offered us the opportunity to minister to others in theirs. Calvary has been a catalyst for real healing in our lives—the kind that has empowered us to serve with our whole selves and demands that we do no less.”

Eva Powell, chair of Calvary’s personnel committee, said the church is grateful for Robinson’s leadership and her willingness to serve.

“As an active member of our congregation, Allyson has preached for us on many occasions, served in various lay leadership positions, and ministered to fellow Calvary members,” Powell said. “We have all had the chance to witness the many ways God has blessed her with a talent for ministry.”

“When it came time to find someone to help lead us until an interim is in place, Allyson was an obvious and natural choice, as someone already within our congregation who is gifted to serve in this capacity,” Powell said.

Robinson’s ordination service came just weeks after a *Time* cover headlined “The Transgender Tipping Point,” forecasting the next big social movement to challenge prevailing cultural beliefs.

The Southern Baptist Convention, meeting June 10–11 in Baltimore, adopted a resolution opposing both attempts to alter “bodily identity” through cross-sex hormone therapy or gender reassignment surgery and “all efforts by any governing official or body to validate transgender identity as morally praiseworthy.”

Powell said the decision by Calvary’s leadership board to select Robinson as transitions pastor was unanimous and indicative of the congregation’s long tradition of striving “to open ourselves to the movement of God’s Spirit in our individual lives and the life of our community.”

“Quite simply, this is who we—Calvary Baptist Church, specifically, and Christians more generally—are called to be,” Powell said, “a place that reflects God’s love and recognizes, affirms, and nurtures God’s call in each of our lives.” —ABPnews